Draft Interim Policy - 2005-06 School Year

Introduction

The primary factor influencing student success in school is opportunity to learn, and the new four-year plan for public education, *Learning for Life II: Brighter Futures Together*, addresses the two major elements of opportunity to learn, which are *quality* and *quantity* of instructional time. On the quality side, there are more specialist teachers, more mentors for teachers in schools in priority areas of mathematics and language arts, more books and resources in schools, and many other quality-related initiatives.

This interim policy has been drafted as part of the response to the quantity element. It responds to feedback received at the Education Partners' Forum in February 2005 about changes they wanted to see in the use of instructional time. The goal of the policy, which applies for the 2005-06 school year, is to help ensure students have the time they need to learn, and teachers have the time to teach. Time is a precious resource in public schools, and it must be protected because it is so important for student learning.

This policy:

- is intended to address areas where schools make choices and decisions about the use of instructional time that are within a school's control, so they can best protect the time they have available for instruction
- is not intended to cover things that schools cannot control, including, as one example, individual parent decisions to permit their children to not be present in school for reasons a parent decides are appropriate for their children and are outside of the school.

Activities that take place outside of classrooms that are linked to achievement of a curricular outcome, such as a history class visiting an historic site, will continue during this year.

In past years, the province has introduced other initiatives to address the quantity element, such as a common school calendar, the *Time to Learn* strategy, and guidelines for specific courses. They all focus on the importance of ensuring the best use of available instructional time. However, as noted above, concerns continue to arise about time and how it is used.

Learning for Life II says (p.21) (*emphasis added*):

> By taking a *fresh look at the structure and use of instructional time*, we can ensure students have the time they need to learn, and teachers have more time to teach
>
> *In consultation with education partners*, ways will be identified to alleviate the pressures on school schedules and to find more instructional time. *Results will be monitored*, to ensure students have the time they need to succeed in their education.

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Background

The *Education Act* enables the Minister to make regulations prescribing the time in session, holidays and vacations of public schools and the minimum hours of instruction to which public school students are entitled, and may prescribe various reporting systems and forms. The Act and regulations provide for 195 days in a school year, of which eight are for report cards, organization, evaluation, administration and PD. The remaining 187 days are instructional time.

The Act enables the Minister to require reports from teachers and school boards. It also authorizes the Minister to collect, compile and disseminate educational statistics and information.

April 2005 P & I Release - 2005-06 School Calendar

The P & I Release mandates 195 teaching days starting on Tuesday, September 6, 2005 and ending on Friday, June 30, 2006. December 20 is the last teaching day and January 3 the return date. March break is March 13-17, and there are six other holidays. There are 8 days for purposes set out in regulations and the Teachers' Provincial Agreement. Two one-half days for parent teacher meetings are also permitted, which reduces available instructional days to 186.

There is a maximum of nine days for examinations, with final examinations for grades 10-12 not before 5 days before the end of the first semester, and not before the 187th day. Nova Scotia examinations are set for January 30-February 1 inclusive, and June 20-22 inclusive.

If, due to unusual circumstances, a school board wants a calendar that does not conform with this, a request for approval may be sent to the Senior Executive Director of Public Schools.

Hours of Instruction

As noted above, students are entitled to 186 days of instructional time, which translates to:

- All grades except P-2: 186 x not less than 5 hours/day = 930 hours of instructional time
- Grades primary to two: 186 x not less than 4 hours/day = 744 hours of instructional time

Interim target minimums for 2005-06:

- Students in all grades except P-2 target 900 hours of instructional time
- Students in grades primary to two target 720 hours of instructional time

The target hours numbers are for *scheduled instructional time*. They are classroom-based and not based on individual student attendance or availability. The difference between total available hours of instruction, and the target for hours of instruction is, in all cases, equivalent to six days, for unforseen circumstances, and interruptions to regular classroom instructional time.

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Maximizing Instructional Time on Task

Several steps are included in this interim policy to maximize scheduled hours of instructional time. They include:

Activities - Linkage to Curriculum - Activities, including field trips, films and excursions, should be clearly linked to achievement of a curriculum outcome.

Activities - Not Linked to Curriculum - For activities, including school or class trips, that are not linked to curriculum outcomes, or that only indirectly linked, schools should limit the number of days of instructional time used for such trips to not more than three. This is the only category to which the 3-day limitation applies.

Activities - Sport, Competitive or Performance - Performance, competitive or sport events (for example, band, school teams, debating teams) are excluded from this policy. To the extent these trips are class-based, schools should consider the target instructional hours for each class in their decision-making. With respect to sport trips, schools should adhere to the guidelines of the Nova Scotia School Athletic Federation.

Individual Student Activities - Parental decisions to permit a child to not be present in school in order for that child to participate in an individual non-school event are excluded from this policy.

School Closures - Should disruptions due to weather, physical plant problems or any other reason mean that the targeted hours of instructional time in classrooms may not be met, schools are to revisit previously-approved out-of-school activities for the balance of the school year, and prioritize them according to their relationship to achieving PSP outcomes.

December and June - To address concerns with December and June, regular instruction, that is meaningful and relevant to the Public School Program, will be required to occur up to December 20 (last school day before Christmas), and until the 187th day in June, when examinations may start in accordance with the P & I release as described on Page 2.

Use of Media - Media shown to students must also normally be available on the Authorized Learning Resources List and be obtained through the Education Media Library.

Teacher Chaperones - A school trip should not interfere with the normal operation of a school for remaining students. Where chaperones are needed, it is expected that school boards have a policy that includes a reasonable ratio of parents and teachers (e.g., three parents to each teacher).

Exemptions - If a school activity does not meet the foregoing standards, then for 2005-06, in exceptional circumstances (e.g. significant advance preparation for a trip), or other circumstance where due diligence has otherwise been exercised, a school board may ask in writing for an exemption, from the Senior Executive Director, Public Schools Branch.

During 2005-06, data will be collected on the use of instructional time, including the incidence of performance, sport and other trips, and longer term direction will be available for 2006-07.

During the Interim/Transition Period of 2005-06

It is expected that during this interim period, this policy will be honoured in each school.

Good quality data are essential to formulating longer-term standards that truly ensure best use of instructional time to support student success. Over the year, all parties including the department, school boards, schools and teachers will be involved in gathering data about use of instructional time. A sampling of schools (approximately 10% across the province) will be invited to track and manage their use of instructional time using an instrument which is being developed in the department through the month of September. This will establish baseline data that can be used to collaboratively formulate longer-term direction.

In this process, additional issues may come to the surface that have not been anticipated here, so in that event, the department may opt to conduct random checks of additional schools through this school year. Any such data will be received and examined in a constructive way, keeping in mind the intention is to find ways to give students the time they need to learn and succeed.

The department will also conduct surveys in certain areas, including but not limited to board policies, current research on use of instructional time, and practices related to extra-curricular participation during instructional time.

Information will be given to School Advisory Councils by principals, and by the department and school boards through SAC co-ordinators in school boards, so they can support their schools' tracking of data through their monitoring role, and other ways in individual schools. SACs will also be invited to give input to the department for the longer-term direction.

Information will also be provided for parents, so they can support their children's teachers in providing their child's education, and support their children in achieving learning success, as they are obliged to do under the Act.

Longer-term direction will be provided to school boards and schools in time for the start of the 2006-07 school year.